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Worth a look

Here we go again. That may have been the reaction by some on Wednesday when they read that 10 Sullivan County communities, including Claremont and Newport, had solicited bids on solid waste disposal and one of those bids came from incinerator operator Wheelabrator.

In fact the company, whose 20-year contract with the soon-to-be dissolved New Hampshire-Vermont Solid Waste Project was often the source of intense disputes, was the nearly the low bidder at \$75 a ton. The Seneca Meadows landfill in New York came in at \$74.50. The other two companies were at \$74.50 a ton and \$77.50.

The 10 towns, which also included Acworth, Charlestown, Unity, Lempster, Goshen and Croydon, had asked the Antioch New England Institute to send a request for proposal to waste disposal facilities from around the region.

The Wheelabrator quote is nearly \$20 less than the figure the company first quoted for towns in the New Hampshire-Vermont Solid Waste Project, after the project breaks up in July.

Many will cringe, some a lot more than cringe, to even think the city would sign on the dotted line with Wheelabrator. But as with most things in life, this is about the bottom line and the predicted savings are significant.

Health and the environment matter but no one suspects that the incinerator will be shut down anytime soon. So if it is not Claremont, Newport and Charlestown trash going into the burner, it will be trash from other towns.

According to the ANEI, if 12 of the 15 communities in Sullivan County send their 23,000 tons of trash a year to the incinerator, the reduction in the tipping fee of \$17 a year would translate into an annual saving of \$390,000 a year. Where have we heard that before? Cheap disposal rates and cheap electricity. That was the prediction when the project was being formulated in the early 1980s and we know now that was never the case. In fact, at one point project towns were paying in excess of \$100 a ton and the project was filing for bankruptcy. It is too early to say whether this is a good deal but we do know a one-year contract with no guaranteed tonnage requirement is far more enticing than another 20-year contract that burdened project towns with outrageous costs.

Trash disposal is a given and the cost always seem to be going up. So any agreement that has the potential to save money is worth a careful look, even one from Wheelabrator.